WE CLAIM:

1.   A distributed resource metering system for billing, comprising in combination:

          a billing component located on a billing client; and

          at least one billing server.

2.   The system of Claim 1, further comprising at least one database.

3.   The system of Claim 1, wherein the billing client and the billing server are linked to a

network.

4.   The system of Claim 3, where in the network is a packet-switched network.

5.   The system of Claim 1, wherein the billing client is a device that is capable of accessing a

network, and wherein the billing client is selected from the group consisting of a personal

computer, a mobile phone, a wireless handheld device, and a packet-switched telephone.

6.   The system of Claim 1, wherein the billing client contains a display.

7.   The system of Claim 6, wherein the display contains a Graphical User Interface.

8.   The system of Claim 6, wherein the display depicts substantially real time billing data.

9.   The system of Claim 6, wherein the display depicts account data.

10.   The system of Claim 6, wherein the display is operable to allow an end user to fund an account.

11.   The system of Claim 1, wherein the billing component contains software providing a communication means for the billing client and the billing server.

12.   The system of Claim 11, wherein the software is a Java applet.

13.   The system of Claim 11, wherein the software is encrypted.

14.   The system of Claim 11, wherein the at least one billing server transfers a latest version of the software onto the billing component.

15.   The system of Claim 1, wherein the at least one billing server is an application server.

16.   The system of Claim 1, wherein the at least one billing server is operable to provide application billing.

17.   The system of Claim 1, wherein the at least one billing server comprises:

        a billing manager; and

        a service manager.

18.   The system of Claim 17, wherein the billing manager is operable to manage data between the billing client and at least one database.

19.   The system of Claim 17, wherein the service manager consists of a collection containing a list of substantially all active end users.

20.   The system of Claim 17, wherein the service manager contains data identifying an end user, a type of service, a rate, an endpoint, and a duration.

21.   The system of Claim 1, wherein the at least one billing server monitors communication between the billing client and a gateway.

22.   The system of Claim 21, wherein a Resource Utilization Update is employed to monitor the communication between the billing client and the gateway.

23.   The system of Claim 22, wherein the Resource Utilization Update contains substantially all data needed to populate a service manager.

24.   The system of Claim 1, wherein Hypertext Transfer Protocol provides a secured communication means for the billing client and the at least one billing server.

25.   The system of Claim 1, wherein the at least one billing server includes a primary billing server and a secondary billing server.

26.   The system of Claim 25, wherein the secondary billing server is substantially the same as the primary billing server.

27.   The system of Claim 25, wherein the primary billing server and the secondary billing server are operable to access at least one database.

28.   The system of Claim 25, wherein the billing client communicates with the secondary billing server when the primary billing server is unavailable.

29.   The system of Claim 2, wherein the at least one database comprises:

        a rating database containing rate information;

        a presence database containing network connection information;

        an account database containing account information; and

        a service database containing service information.

30.   A distributed resource metering system for billing, comprising in combination:

        a billing component located on a billing client, wherein the billing client contains a display operable to depict substantially real time billing data;

        at least one billing server, wherein the billing component provides a secured communication means for the billing client and the at least one billing server, wherein the

at least one billing server includes a billing manager and a service manager, and wherein

the at least one billing server monitors communication between the billing client and a

gateway using a Resource Utilization Update; and

at least one database, wherein the billing manager is operable to manage data

10 between the billing client and the at least one database.

31. The system of Claim 30, wherein the billing client and the billing server are linked to a

network.

32. The system of Claim 31, wherein the network is a packet-switched network.

33. The system of Claim 30, wherein the billing client is a device that is capable of accessing

a network, and wherein the billing client is selected from the group consisting of a personal

computer, a mobile phone, a wireless handheld device, and a packet-switched telephone.

34. The system of Claim 30, wherein the at least one billing server includes a primary billing

server and a secondary billing server, and wherein the billing client communicates with the

secondary billing server when the primary billing server is unavailable.

35. The system of Claim 30, wherein the at least one database comprises:

a rating database containing rate information;

a presence database containing network connection information;

an account database containing account information; and

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5   a service database containing service information.

36.   A method for providing distributed resource metering for billing, comprising in

combination:

          sending a request for a service to a billing server;

          querying at least one database;

5   providing a status response to a billing client; and

          monitoring communication between the billing client and a gateway.

37.   The method of Claim 36, further comprising terminating the service.

38.   The method of Claim 36, wherein the request for the service is a serialized encrypted

Java object.

39.   The method of Claim 36, wherein communication between the billing client and the

billing server uses HyperText Transfer Protocol and Transmission Control Protocol/Internet

Protocol.

40.   The method of Claim 36, wherein the billing server transfers a latest version of software

onto a billing component located on the billing client.

41.   The method of Claim 36, wherein the billing client uses the gateway to access a service.

42.   The method of Claim 41, wherein the service is accessed through a media channel, and wherein the media channel is selected from the group consisting of voice, video, instant messaging, Web browsing, and file downloading.

43.   The method of Claim 36, wherein the billing server verifies that the billing client is authorized to make the request for the service.

44.   The method of Claim 43, wherein authorization requires account funding for pre-paid accounts, and wherein an end user is operable to fund a pre-paid account, thereby allowing the billing server to authorize the billing client.

45.   The method of Claim 36, wherein the billing server provides gateway information to the billing client.

46.   The method of Claim 36, wherein the billing server monitors the communication between the billing client and the gateway using a Resource Utilization Update.

47.   The method of Claim 46, wherein the Resource Utilization Update contains substantially all data needed to populate a service manager.

48.   The method of Claim 46, wherein the Resource Utilization Update is a serialized Java object.

49.   The method of Claim 36, wherein the billing server maintains a service manager.

50.   The method of Claim 49, wherein the service manager contains data identifying an end user, a type of service, a rate, an endpoint, and a duration.

51.   The method of Claim 36, wherein an end user receives substantially real time billing data.

52.   The method of Claim 37, wherein the billing client terminates the service.

53.   The method of Claim 37, wherein the billing server terminates the service when an end user account is substantially zero.

54.   The method of Claim 37, wherein the billing server terminates the service when the billing client stops transmitting a Resource Utilization Update.

55.   The method of Claim 37, wherein the billing server may transfer data from a service manager to at least one database substantially after terminating the service.

56.   The method of Claim 36, further comprising generating a bill for the service.

57.   The method of Claim 56, wherein the bill for service provides application billing.

58.   A method of providing real time billing data, comprising in combination:

downloading a billing component onto a billing client;

monitoring communication between the billing client and a gateway; and

updating billing data on a display substantially in real time, wherein the display is

5   located on a billing client.

59.   The method of Claim 58, wherein the billing component is a Java applet.

60.   The method of Claim 58, wherein the billing client is a device that is capable of accessing

a network, and wherein the billing client is selected from the group consisting of a personal

computer, a mobile phone, a wireless handheld device, and a packet-switched telephone.

61.   The method of Claim 58, wherein a Resource Utilization Update is employed to monitor

the communication between the billing client and the gateway.

62.   The method of Claim 58, wherein the display contains a Graphical User Interface.

63.   The method of Claim 58, wherein the display is operable to allow an end user to fund an

account.

64.   A system for providing distributed resource metering for billing, comprising in

combination:

a means for sending a request for a service to a billing server;

a means for querying at least one database;

5   a means for providing a status response to a billing client; and

a means for monitoring communication between the billing client and a gateway.